

Bird Notes from Boree (New England Plateau)

By Mrs. S. P. W. NORTON, R.A.O.U., Tamworth, N.S.W.

Boree is situated on the top of the New England Tableland, N.S.W., 50 miles south of Armidale. It is 3500 feet above sea-level, and the winters are bitterly cold. In wet seasons heavy falls of snow are fairly frequent, and in dry years the frosts are very severe. During July and August, 1919—a drought year—the thermometer frequently fell to 12 deg. or 15 deg. Fahr. at night (20 deg. of frost), and by day piercingly cold westerly winds would blow.

The summer sun is scorching, but the shade temperature is not high, and the nights are cool. The country is slightly hilly, with wide, clear valleys between. The hills are thickly clothed with stringybark trees, with large patches of bracken-fern here and there; the haunt of Tits and Wrens. A great deal of the country is ring-barked, and covered with dead trees and fallen logs.

A small creek runs through the property. It flows only during winter or wet seasons. At other times it is merely a succession of small waterholes from two to five feet deep, fringed with a low growth of rushes round a muddy margin. One or two waterholes have gravelly edges. These are frequented by Dottrels. Along the creek flats grow white gum and "peppermint" trees. Among these the Noisy Miners, Magpies and Butcher-Birds make their home.

On one portion of the creek is an "island"—a piece of higher ground surrounded by marshy land. On this the timber has been left green and thick. It is not more than 150 yards long, by, say, 75 yards wide, yet on that one spot in October, 1919, I found the following nests:—Scarlet-breasted Robin, 5 nests; Flame-breasted Robin, 1; Satin Fly-catcher, 1; White-throated Fly-eater, 1; White-shafted Fantail, 1; Harmonious Thrush, 2; Rufous-breasted Whistler, 1; Black and White Fantail, 1; Yellow Tits, 2; Wattle Bird, 1; Friar-Bird, 1; Soldier-Birds (Noisy Miners), 3; Magpie-Lark, 1.

It was the richest little spot in birds and nests I have known. Away from the creek the back country is watered by small dams, the haunt of Herons and Dottrels.

The house is situated on a rather stony hill, overlooking the creek, though some distance from it, and is surrounded by *Pinus insignis* trees, ever-green hedges and a fruit orchard. To the west is a natural breakwind of thick-growing peppermints. Twenty five miles due east of Boree, the N.E. tableland breaks off abruptly in precipitous cliffs and very steep mountain sides, descending rapidly several thousand feet to the coastal country. This eastern side is known as the "Falls country," as the water-courses flowing eastward all plunge over into deep gorges and

canons forming in many places very fine waterfalls, and really magnificent canyons, some with sheer bare cliff sides, others beautifully clothed in brush and pine scrubs. The "Falls Country" is wild and rough and thickly timbered. Forests of casuarina abound and Lyre-Birds, Satin Bower-Birds and so on are plentiful, but since the boundaries of "Boree" do not extend to this country I have not included any of the birds found there in my list.

These are only the birds actually seen *by myself* on "Boree" during the spring and summer of 1919, and autumn and winter of 1920.

Coturnix pectoralis. Stubble-Quail.—Very common most of the year. One little chap lived in the garden for weeks, and became so tame he would come to be fed every morning.

Ocyphaps lophotes. Crested Pigeon.—A pair spent a few hours in the garden during December. Evidently in migration; none seen since.

Gallinula tenebrosa. Black Moor-Hen.—Occasionally seen about the creek, but not common.

Podiceps ruficollis. Black-throated Grebe (Dabchick).—A few always to be found on the dams and the creek.

Lobibyx novæ-hollandiæ. Spur-winged Plover.—Always plentiful about the creek and flats. A pair bred not twenty feet outside our garden fence on a stony hillside.

Zonifer tricolor. Black-breasted Plover.—Not so common as the Spur-wing, but fairly plentiful. A pair of these birds bred quite near the house and beside a main road, along which motor cars and other traffic passed frequently all day.

Charadrius melanops. Black-fronted Dottrel (Sand-Piper).—A pair of these birds were almost always to be found at each dam and water-hole.

Burhinus grallarius. Southern Stone-Plover.—These birds used to be extremely common about here, but since the coming of the fox they have become very rare, and through the whole year I only heard one calling during a night in November (1919).

Threskiornis molucca. Straw-necked Ibis (Dry-weather Bird).—Present in immense flocks during the late summer and autumn months.

Platalea flavipes. Yellow-billed Spoonbill.—Four seen about the creek in February.

Notophox novæ-hollandiæ. White-fronted Heron.—A solitary bird, always lives about the dam near the house. Others are often seen along the creek.

Notophox pacifica. White-necked Heron.—Usually a very rare bird here, but during this year (1919), no doubt owing to the abnormal conditions created by the prolonged drought, several solitary birds took up positions on the little water-holes and dams. Each bird seemed to keep entirely to his chosen place, and to have no intercourse with the others. One shared—apparently most amicably—the small dam near the house with the old White-fronted Heron.

Nycticorax caledonicus. Nankeen Night-Heron.—All through the summer one slept by day in a gum-tree near the house; flying to the creek at dusk.

Anas superciliosa. Black Duck.—Always in small flocks on the creek water-holes, and in October numerous pairs were breeding among the rushes growing all along the muddy margins of the creek.

Chenonetta jubata. Maned Goose.—Small flocks always about the water-holes. Also bred among the dead trees along the creek banks.

Phalacrocorax fuscescens. White-breasted Cormorant (Shag).—A pair were always about the creek.

Phalacrocorax ater. Little Black Cormorant.—A few often came on to the creek for a few days at a time.

Pelecanus conspicillatus. Pelican.—Four of these birds appeared on the dam near the house late one evening, and after resting there all that night and next day departed; none seen since.

Urcaetus audax. Wedge-tailed Eagle.—Occasionally seen sailing in the sky.

Haliastur sphenurus. Whistling Eagle.—Extremely common; sometimes after rabbit poisoning, literally in hundreds feasting on the carcasses.

Ieracidea berigora. Brown Hawk.—Often seen, but not plentiful.

Cerchneis cenchroides. Nankeen Kestrel.—Always a few pairs about. In February there came a plague of grasshoppers and for a few days the Kestrels were around in dozens, snapping up the pests. It was a charming sight to watch them wheel and hover and swoop.

Ninox boobook. Boobook Owl.—One lived in a tree near the house; it called every night, and was sometimes seen.

Glossopsitta concinna. Musk Lorikeet.—Large flocks appeared during the period of the flowering of the eucalypts, and remained till the bloom was over, shrieking all day, and roosting in close ranks all over the branches of a tall dead tree near the house at night.

Calyptorhynchus funereus. Black Cockatoo.—A flock of about a dozen lived in the stringy-bark ridges, where they tore long strips of bark from the trees. About March they all go east to the "Falls" country to the casuarinas to breed. They return in June or July.

Cacatua galerita. White Cockatoo.—Large flocks attacked the crops in February and March.

Platycercus elegans. Crimson Rosella.—Not often seen so high as this, but very plentiful a little farther to the east in the "Falls" country. A pair took up their residence in the garden during the summer, and were most destructive to the fruit, especially the raspberries.

Platycercus eximius. Rosella.—One of the commonest birds here. Always about. This summer especially they were present in large flocks, and were most destructive to the crops.

Podargus strigoides. Tawny Frogmouth.—A pair build each year in a gum-tree quite near the house, and are always about.

Eurystomus orientalis. Australian Roller (Dollar Bird).—Pairs were frequently seen during the summer.

Dacelo gigas. Laughing Kingfisher.—Very common. During the winter they were frequently found lying dead in the bush. Probably the long drought and lack of food were responsible.

Halycon sanctus. Sacred Kingfisher.—Several pairs were about during the summer.

Chaetura caudacuta. Spine-tailed Swift.—Often seen winging their way high overhead.

Cuculus pallidus. Pallid Cuckoo.—Fairly plentiful; more often heard than seen; very often called all night.

Cacomantis flabelliformis. Fan-tailed Cuckoo.—Sometimes seen in the bush.

Chalcites basalis. Narrow-billed Bronze-Cuckoo.—One pair only seen during the summer.

Lamprocoeyx plagosus. Bronze Cuckoo.—Often seen. In March and April they were to be seen in little flocks of ten or so in the bush.

Scythrops novæ-hollandiæ. Channel-bill.—One was heard flying and calling overhead just before a storm, but was not seen.

Hirundo neoxena. Welcome Swallow.—Very numerous in spring and summer. Building all round the verandahs and in the out-houses. Generally they leave us about April, but this year did not go till June.

Hylochelidon nigricans. Tree Martin.—Very common in summer. In the autumn huge flocks gathered and mingled with the Welcome Swallows. The telephone line was one continuous black row of Martins and Swallows all day long. Soon after they seemed to depart together.

Petroica multicolor. Scarlet-breasted Robin.—Very common in summer in the bush, and in winter in the open. In October I found five nests of this species on one little point of land running out into the creek. They generally build in stringy-bark saplings, but also on dead limbs of small trees. The hen-bird about here is much more brightly coloured than in the lower country. Her breast has a small patch of really bright vermilion red; quite a different shade from that of the male bird.

Petroica phoenicea. Flame-breasted Robin.—Only occasionally seen here; not at all common.

Petroica goodenovii. Red-capped Robin.—A rare bird about here. Sometimes seen in the stringybark scrub. A pair came into the garden this summer, and seemed inclined to build in one of the fruit trees. A brutal cat killed the male, and the little hen-bird remained alone in the garden all the summer. She took possession of the tree which she and her mate had chosen and chased all other little birds out of it in the most pugnacious way. After evicting some little Tit or Finch, she would sit on a top-most twig and warble a funny, gurgly, almost inaudible, little song of triumph. She became very tame, and would flit about after me when I was working in the garden, sitting on a stake or fence and watching me, but I never saw her eat a worm. She left in April.

Melanodryas cucullata. Hooded Robin.—One only seen during the summer, in the clear ring-barked country.

Gerygone albogularis. White-throated Flyeater.—The sweet song of these tiny birds was to be heard all through the summer in the bush, where they also nested.

Eopsaltria australis. Yellow-breasted Shrike-Robin.—One pair only observed in the stringy-bark.

Falcunculus frontatus. Yellow-breasted Shrike-Tit.—Two pairs only observed in the stringy-bark ridges in March. They tore the bark from the branches with their stout bills while searching for insects.

Pachycephala pectoralis. Golden-breasted Whistler.—Several pairs were observed in the stringy-bark ridges in the spring and summer.

Pachycephala rufiventris. Rufous-breasted Whistler.—Always to be seen and heard all through the summer months, but leaving us in the winter.

Rhipidura flabellifera. White-shafted Fantail.—Often seen in the bush, and very occasionally visited the garden.

Rhipidura leucophrys. Black and White Fantail (Willie Wagtail).—Very common. A very amusing pair built every year in the garden, and were extremely tame and friendly, often coming right into the rooms through an open window.

Myiagra cyanoleuca. Satin Flycatcher.—In October (1919) one pair nested by the creek.

Graucalus novæ-hollandiæ. Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike.—Plentiful during the summer months in the bush.

Campephaga tricolor. White-shouldered Caterpillar-eater.—Plentiful during the summer months, mostly frequenting the open ring-barked ridges.

Cinclorhampus mathewsi. Rufous Song-lark.—A pair lived in the garden for some weeks during the summer. They then departed and no more were seen.

Epthianura albifrons. White-fronted Chat.—A small flock roosted all through the winter months in the thick hedges in the garden, flying out into the adjoining fields by day. In spring they disappeared.

Acrocephalus australis. Reed-Warbler.—Very plentiful about the river banks about six miles from Borce where they were nesting as late as January (1920). None to be found about this creek.

Acanthiza nana. Little Tit-Warbler.—Not common, but sometimes seen in the bush.

Acanthiza pusilla. Brown Tit-Warbler.—Very common in small flocks in the bush.

Acanthiza lineata. Striated Tit-Warbler.—Not common, but sometimes seen in the bush.

Acanthiza chrysorrhœa. Yellow-tailed Tit-Warbler.—Common. Two pairs always live in the garden, where they breed, and are most useful, destroying large quantities of aphids and grubs.

Acanthiza reguloides. Buff-tailed Tit-Warbler.—Sometimes seen in the bush, where I distinguished them from the Yellow-tail by their characteristic little nest, sometimes built in a fence post-hole or in a creek in a tree-trunk.

Sericornis frontalis. White-browed Scrub-Wren.—One pair only were observed in October among the low tea-tree by the creek where they built.

Malurus cyaneus. Blue Wren-Warbler. — Common among the bracken on the hills, but never came to the garden.

Artamus superciliosus and *A. personatus*. White-browed and Masked Wood-Swallows.—Were present in large flocks (together) in October. Later the Masked disappeared, and a few pairs of White-browed remained and nested (in company) close about the homestead. In March and April the White-browed again appeared in numbers, but the Masked were not seen again.

Artamus cyanopterus. Dusky Wood-Swallow.—Rather rare here; only two pairs observed during the year.

Grallina cyanoleuca. Magpie-lark.—Always living and breeding along the creek.

Colluricincla harmonica. Grey Shrike-Thrush (Harmonious Thrush).—Common in the hills; one became very tame during the winter, and came to the house for crumbs with the "Soldier" Birds.

Neositta chrysoptera. Orange-winged Nuthatch (Treerunner).—A flock of six was seen one afternoon running head first down the upper branches of a dead gum.

Neositta pileata. Black-capped Nuthatch.—One pair only seen in open, ring-barked country.

Climacteris picumna. Brown Tree-Creeper.—Common in the bush. They chiefly frequent the dead timber country.

Climacteris leucophæa. White-throated Tree-Creeper.—Very common. They chiefly confine their range to the green timber. Found breeding (young ones) as early as August 4th this year (1920), when the weather was still extremely cold.

Zosterops lateralis. Silver or White-eye.—Only once observed a few in the garden eating aphids from the rose-bushes. Not at all common here.

Pardalotus striatus. Red-tipped Pardalote.—A very common little bird; to be heard calling "wit-e-chu" all the year through and building in both tree hollows and holes in banks.

Pardalotus punctatus. Spotted Pardalote.—Fairly common; coming down into the low bushes during the winter, where they were often seen.

Melithreptus lunulatus. White-naped Honey-eater (Black-cap).—Very numerous in the eucalypt trees.

Glyciphila albifrons. White-fronted Honey-eater.—A small flock appeared one day and remained all that day in the eucalypts near the house, but were not seen again.

Meliphaga chrysops. Yellow-faced Honey-eater.—Our commonest Honey-eater; very plentiful all through the summer, building in the garden and wreaking havoc on soft fruits. They leave us about June and go to the east.

Meliphaga leucotis. White-eared Honey-eater.—Fairly common in the stringy-bark country, where several nests were discovered in October, all placed very low down in "suckers" growing from the trunks of burnt trees.

Myzantha garrula. Noisy Miner (Soldier-Bird).—Very common among the "peppermint" gums, but not seen among the stringy-bark.

Anthochaera carunculata. Wattle-Bird (Chock. Gill-bird).—Very common and very destructive to fruit during the spring and summer. They breed here and depart east about April.

Philemon corniculatus. Friar-Bird (Leather-head).—Very common and troublesome among fruit during the spring and summer. They breed here and leave about April.

Anthus australis. Australian Pipit (Ground Lark).—Very common on the clear flats and crop lands. They seem to congregate together in the autumn, when flocks are to be seen in the crop lands.

Zonæginthus guttatus. Spotted-sided Finch.—Common. Nine pairs build in the garden and live there all through the summer months. They split up into very small flocks or pairs, and retire to the bush for the winter.

Egintha temporalis. Red-browed Finch.—Rare here, but sometimes seen in the bush.

Corcorax melanorhamphus. White-winged Chough.—Small flocks are always to be found in the stringy-bark ridges, and their big mud nests are common.

Strepera graculina. Pied Bell-Magpie (Black or Port Macquarie Magpie).—Not common here, but very numerous a few miles to the east.

Corvus coronoides and *C. cecilia*. Australian Raven and Crow.—Often about, and breeding in the hills.

Cracticus torquatus. Collared Butcher-Bird.—Two pairs always inhabit the belt of eucalypts near the house and nest there each year.

Gymnorhina tibicen. Black-backed Magpie.—About our commonest bird; very plentiful all the year round.

Introduced Birds.

Passer domesticus. Sparrows.—Up to 1920 had not taken up residence at Boree, though plentiful in the township of Walcha, five miles distant.

Carduelis carduelis. Goldfinches.—Occasionally seen.

Sturnus vulgaris. Starlings.—Becoming very numerous.